

The Politics of Persuasion:  
The “NO HYMN of hate” of the CPI and the Four Minute Men  
during the First World War

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Mrs. L.R. Meeker trudged up and down, eyeing the line of people waiting to receive a marriage license before the U.S. military draft. Filled with passion and anger, she alternated between fits of crying and then screaming into the throng of what she believed to be “slackers.” Mrs. Meeker grabbed one of these young men by the arm “fiercely,” challenging his masculinity by asking him “are you a man ... what’s your sex?” She then shouted into the sea of bystanders: “[your] country can die, women and children be killed-you don’t care!” Mrs. Meeker let loose of the slacker, who had “only smiled and puffed away nonchalantly at his cigarette,” and she moved on down the line, continuing to belittle the awestruck individuals in the crowd. Mrs. Meeker was effective, she was fierce and she was determined. Proof of her impact appeared the following day when one of the men who had been waiting in the line returned his marriage license, declaring that he did not want branded a “slacker.”<sup>1</sup> This man, and probably several others, did not want people to believe that he got married just to avoid the military draft.

While it is doubtful that Mrs. Meeker was a part of the Four Minute Men, her reaction demonstrates that there are few occasions in history when emotions run as high as in times of war. Passionate commitment to families, nations, and soldiers escalates during these trying moments. To help direct the support for the Great War into areas that would benefit the nation, the U.S. government created a war promotion department, the Committee on Public Information (CPI). The major obstacle to the proper promotion of U.S. entry into World War

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<sup>1</sup> “‘Slackers’ Lashed By Woman as Traitors,” *Chicago Daily News*, April 13, 1917, Archives of the Newberry Library (hereafter cited as ANL).

One involved the ability to communicate values and principles essential for democracy, such as reasoned discourse. Without civil and reasoned discourse, a democracy's ability to secure consensus views is imperiled. The CPI created the Four Minute Men to distribute information to the general public about the war and various wartime promotions such as food conservation, Liberty Bonds, and Red Cross drives. Essentially a volunteer army, the Four Minute Men consisted of over 75,000 public speakers in 5,200 communities. During the eighteen months of U.S. involvement in the war, the Four Minute Men made 755,190 speeches at various civil institutions throughout the nation.<sup>2</sup>

As the war progressed, the speeches of the Four Minute Men evolved and reflected the impassioned and sometimes prejudicial views of the speakers and their audiences, requiring regulation by the CPI. Consequently, the CPI issued numerous written materials that included samples of both good and bad speeches so that the Four Minute Men would produce “no hymns of hate.”<sup>3</sup> However, many examples of good speeches employed cultural references similar to the examples of bad speeches and the published guidelines for acceptable rhetoric often contradicted earlier statements, leading to difficulty establishing proper expectations for the Four Minute Men. Numerous examples, some straight from the Four Minute Men offices, illustrate these claims: “We must keep those goose-stepping, baby killing educated gorillas away from our shores.” The section concluded with the statement that the Four Minute Men should “contrast these examples” with their own and “form their own conclusions,” without informing the Four Minute Men whether these speeches were an appropriate or inappropriate example.<sup>4</sup> The line of demarcation between acceptable and unacceptable rhetoric became blurred and many times the “proper” and “inappropriate” speeches were almost indistinguishable. This paper explores the

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<sup>2</sup> George Creel, *How We Advertised America*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920), 7, 84. ANL.

<sup>3</sup> Four Minute Men Division of the CPI, *Four Minute Men News Edition A*, (Washington, DC: 1917), 2. ANL.

<sup>4</sup> Four Minute Men Division of the CPI, *Four Minute Men News Edition D*, (Washington, DC: June 29, 1918), 17. ANL.

consistently inconsistent guidelines that were published by the CPI in the Four Minute Men Bulletins, and how the guidelines affected their speeches and potentially the American public in general.

Although historians have studied the CPI and Four Minute Men, they have overlooked the contradictions and inconsistencies in instructions provided to speakers. Most examples detailing the activities of the Four Minute Men are contained in sections or chapters of works dealing with either Public Relations or the CPI. Consequently, secondary sources that deal directly with the Four Minute Men are limited, but there are a few that handle it indirectly. There are more secondary sources that deal with the Four Minute Men, how they changed public announcements and their effectiveness, but few sources discuss the cultural significance of their actions. The most prominent example is Stuart Ewen's *PR!: A Social History of Spin*. Ewen's chapter, "House of Truth," specifically deals with the CPI, the Four Minute Men, and how public opinion could be changed through their daily interactions with people. Larson and Mock (1939) detail the work of the CPI, and dedicate one chapter specifically to the Four Minute Men. The Four Minute Men have been explored in their relation to speech theory and civic participation (Yost, 1919; Mastrangelo, 2009; Sproule 2010). Cornibise (1984) gives strong analysis of the Four Minute Men Bulletins and concludes that the Four Minute Men were vital to the CPI. However, he does not look into the blatant inconsistencies of the Bulletins regarding appropriate and inappropriate examples of Four Minute Men speeches.

To tell the whole story of the Four Minute Men, a brief look at the CPI is required. The CPI was created in 1917 and led by muckraking journalist George Creel. In the CPI's endeavors, Creel received assistance from men who would become the founders of Public Relations (PR) such as Edward Bernays, Ivy Lee, and Carl R. Byoir, as well as future Pulitzer Prize winner

Ernest Poole. They created an advertising and PR campaign for the government that was practically unparalleled.<sup>5</sup> The *New York Times* felt that by creating the CPI and “combining the censorship with the duties of a publicity committee” the U.S. could “avoid the blunders made by Great Britain in her first efforts to establish satisfactory censorship restrictions.”<sup>6</sup> Creel also confirmed that the main goal of the CPI was to “use every possible rhetorical technique to sell the United States on war.” Consequently, the CPI created numerous interwoven divisions that created posters, movies, advertisements, pamphlets, books, school curricula and the Four Minute Men.<sup>7</sup> The mixture of muckraking journalism and PR was important as it gave credibility to the CPI since muckrakers and PR consultants were corporate and ideological opponents before the war.<sup>8</sup> This mixture produced a sense of balance and neutrality and proved essential for legitimacy as the CPI sought the task of “selling” patriotism to gain and maintain public support for a war that was not popular.<sup>9</sup>

In the era before the radio, the easiest way to disseminate mass information was by newspapers and public speakers. However, at a time of 30% illiteracy among Blacks, almost 13% illiteracy among immigrants, and no guarantee people would actually read newspapers, there was a need for public speakers promoting U.S. policy.<sup>10</sup> The CPI’s answer was the Four Minute Men. The idea was birthed by steel tycoon and “handsome rosy-cheeked youth” Donald

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<sup>5</sup> Alan Axelrod, *Selling the Great War: The Making of American Propaganda*, (New York: MacMillan, 2009), 84, 92, 115-116.

<sup>6</sup> “Creel to Direct Nation's Publicity: Magazine Writer Is Appointed Chairman of Committee That Also Will Handle Censorship,” *New York Times*, April 15, 1917.

<sup>7</sup> Lisa Mastrangelo, “World War I, Public Intellectuals, and the Four Minute Men: Convergent Ideals of Public Speaking and Civic Participation,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12 (2009): 608.

<sup>8</sup> Stuart Ewen, *PR!: A Social History of Spin*, (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 109-110.

<sup>9</sup> Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 90; Axelrod, *Selling the Great War*, 116 & 120. David M. Kennedy. *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, 2004), 46; Jackson Lear. *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 339. However, it should be noted that no less of a scholar than Richard Hofstadter in *The Age of Reform* (1955) states that war fever was “shared by the majority of Americans in both major parties” (275).

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970; and Current Population Reports, Series P-23, Ancestry and Language in the United States: November 1979.

Ryerson, who came to the CPI to tell George Creel about his creation of minute men in Chicago and their effectiveness. Although Creel was always getting stopped by people who thought they knew how to save America from the Germans, he realized that the use of vis-à-vis publicity by public speaking would be the most direct way to get the unmolested “truth” about the war to the masses.<sup>11</sup> The Four Minute Men were used by President Wilson to deliver his speeches to the general public, including his infamous speech on the Fourth of July, 1918 in which he articulated his unpopular plan for peace at the end of the war.<sup>12</sup> Wilson’s employment of the Four Minute Men demonstrates the usefulness and effectiveness of their speeches in circulating large volumes of information.<sup>13</sup>

Ideally the Four Minute Men consisted of prominent local men, whose speeches would be relatable to local audiences. Since the U.S. contained large enclaves of immigrants at the beginning of twentieth century, speakers from these groups often addressed the group in their native language to bring a sense of kinship and camaraderie. The CPI also encouraged women to speak at women’s clubs and matinee movie shows and created a Division of Women’s War-Work, led by Ida Tarbell, to assist them in their efforts.<sup>14</sup> Children and college students were also recruited to help “teachers in their task instead of hindering” the promotion of U.S. wartime policies.<sup>15</sup> To reach children who could not read or write yet, the CPI utilized altered nursery rhymes such as this version of Little Boy Blue:

Little Boy Blue, Come blow your horn,  
The cook’s using wheat when she ought to use corn;  
And terrible famine our country will sweep,  
If the cooks and the housewives remain fast asleep!  
Go wake them! Go wake them! It’s now up to you!

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<sup>11</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 7, 84; Axelrod, *Selling the Great War*, 114-115; “Wilson Praises D.M. Ryerson And 4-Minute-Men: President Writes Letter Emphasizing.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Nov. 19, 1917. ANL.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Vaughn, *Holding Fast the Inner Lines: Democracy, Nationalism, and the Committee on Public Information*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), xii. ANL.

<sup>13</sup> Mastrangelo, “World War I,” 612.

<sup>14</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 94, 210.

<sup>15</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 113, 86, 91-92.

Be a loyal American, Little Boy Blue!<sup>16</sup>

France offered to help American Universities replace German models of education because “while German methods of study, while doubtless excellent, in many respects, perhaps erred in inculcating too great a respect for facts as such.”<sup>17</sup> Teachers encouraged children to sign pledge cards promising that they would clean their plates and eat corn instead of wheat and instructed them about who “started” the war, enemy aliens, and the “league of nations and why it should be formed.”<sup>18</sup> The Junior Four Minute Men, the elementary school children, were viewed as “more loyal than the parents” and the Bulletins “fortified the children in their patriotism” and “helped the children convert the parents.” One Bulletin says that “nowhere do the good results stop with the children. Inevitably their elders have also been stimulated.”<sup>19</sup> The CPI sought to reach all areas of society and the CPI’s use of the Four Minute Men created a network that could quickly dispense information to the public by people who were influential and inspirational.

To communicate effectively to an audience, the CPI had to recruit local people of prominence. In most societies, prominent “opinion leaders” influence people more than pure media saturation. In a 1940 study, scientists concluded that most people receive “information and influence” from people they hold to high esteem and not from traditional media sources.<sup>20</sup> In this study, the scientists concluded that while “opinion leaders” got their information from a variety of sources including traditional media, the “opinion leaders” were key to the dissemination and promotion of information and ideas to others in their community. Thus, people still consumed media to acquire significant amounts of information, but they sought confirmation of these ideas

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<sup>16</sup> Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920*, (New York: Free Press, 2003), 293-294.

<sup>17</sup> “‘Kultur’ In America Attacked by France” *Chicago Daily News*, April 24, 1917.

<sup>18</sup> Frank Crane “Hints for Teachers: Starting the Democracy of To-morrow,” *Chicago Daily News*, Nov. 11, 1917; Tanfer Emin Tunc, “Less Sugar, More Warships: Food as American Propaganda in the First World War,” *War in History*, (2012): 208.

<sup>19</sup> *Four Minute Men News Edition D*, 17, ANL.

<sup>20</sup> Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1986), 106.

from their “opinion leaders.” The 1940 study illustrates how fashion trends move through societal groups, but also demonstrates the effectiveness of the Four Minute Men when they stayed on task. Furthermore, it illuminates why it was imperative for the Four Minute Men to be prominent men in their communities to instill trust in both the speaker and the speech, and shows how movements develop when people who are undecided about their position and beliefs adopt the position of an influential peer.<sup>21</sup> Sincerity in thought and action was essential for the success of the Four Minute Men, so the CPI highlighted the fact that they were unpaid volunteers and paid for advertisements to emphasize that all Four Minute Men were uncompensated.<sup>22</sup> For any person to influence another, whether it is to sell a product or to sell a war, trust is essential.

Although many of the Four Minute Men were lawyers, bankers and other professionals, regulation of speeches proved necessary as many people exaggerated claims. Consequently, the exaggerations led many people to discredit not only the Four Minute Men, but the CPI and the Federal Government. To help the Four Minute Men educate the public and to prevent the speakers from going off topic, forty-six Four Minute Men Bulletins were produced covering the thirty-six different CPI sponsored campaigns such as food conservation, purchasing Liberty Bonds, and supporting various Red Cross drives.<sup>23</sup> Some of these pamphlets were popular and influential enough to be compared to Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, pamphlets were produced “giving the leading facts” about the “rupture with Germany...contrasting the spirit of Prussianism and Americanism.”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, numerous pamphlets and Bulletins were distributed in English and the national languages of the speakers’ various ethnic groups,

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<sup>21</sup> Mastrangelo, “World War I,” 617.

<sup>22</sup> *Four Minute Men News Edition A*, 13, ANL; Mastrangelo, “World War I,” 616.

<sup>23</sup> “Lauds Four Minute Men,” *New York Times*, December 26, 1918.

<sup>24</sup> Solon J. Buck ed. “America’s Fight for Public Opinion.” *Publications of the Minnesota historical society*, Minnesota History Bulletin III 1919-1920, 5, ANL.

<sup>25</sup> “Pamphlet Arraigns German Autocracy: President’s War Address Amplified and Illuminated in an Official Publication,” *New York Times*, June 11, 1917.



including Yiddish, Italian, Germans, as well as numerous other languages. Originally the Bulletins were brief, but as the war progressed and the Four Minute Men organization grew and produced speeches that exaggerated beyond acceptable limits, the Bulletins quickly expanded. The extended Bulletins contained patriotic poems, stories of Four Minute Men successfully making a difference in people's lives, and speech outlines.<sup>26</sup> Toward the end of the Bulletins, there was "material covering every phase of the question to be discussed" as well as "two or three" exemplary examples of Four Minute Men speeches.<sup>27</sup> The later Bulletins also contained intricate explanations for the various campaigns of the CPI and details of the war. On the one hand, newsletters were produced for state administrators, although not exclusively. Some of these newsletters contained inspirational stories such as a woman claiming that she wanted to buy a war bond because "she had spanked the Kaiser...when she was 9 and the Kaiser 7 years old, for pulling off her bonnet." The story went on to say that she wanted to buy bonds "to help spank him again."<sup>28</sup> Humorous anecdotal stories such as this could amuse the Four Minute Men and their audiences, but also could serve as an illustration in a speech if needed. These stories illustrate that the CPI was concerned with their image and took steps to control their image.

As the Four Minute Men only had four minutes to deliver a speech that covered their entire agenda, the Bulletins distributed by the CPI were intended to keep the speakers on topic. Ideally, the Four Minute Men's speeches were to maintain facts and not entice pure emotive responses, but by February of 1918, the CPI felt it necessary to correct their behavior and to produce guidelines. The Bulletins reiterated that the Four Minute Men should not "appeal to emotionalism," but that an "appeal to the emotions through conviction by statement of facts secures true converts." The Bulletin then declared that "converts who when once convinced

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<sup>26</sup> Mastrangelo, "World War I," 613.

<sup>27</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 93.

<sup>28</sup> *Four Minute Men News Edition A*, 8, ANL.

remain convinced.”<sup>29</sup> The CPI’s use of strong language and constant reiteration is intriguing. What was going on with the Four Minute Men that compelled the CPI to create Bulletins to contain their enthusiasm?

One possible answer lies in the *Four Minute Men News Edition A*, which opens by giving unequivocal guidelines for the speeches of the Four Minute Men:

NO HYMN of hate accompanies our message. This is a war for ideals, and in marching toward victory we must not trample on The Ideal. As Government representatives, we Four Minute Men must never forget our mission, not to arouse hatred, not to inflame passion, but to show facts, to inspire deeper convictions ... We are speaking not to secure applause from those already convinced, but to convince the skeptic and to arouse the apathetic. Overstatement drives away those who are mildly interested, and it may shock those whose enthusiasm for the war has not tainted their sense of fairness. Violent assertion of what may be true simply breeds more skepticism. In a cause so just as ours the obvious facts are so many and the fundamentals are so very clear that we need but dwell on these. There are many millions still to whom these fundamental facts must be made clear. And if, in each speech by every Four Minute Man before every audience, one, or two, or three skeptics are turned into converts, what a wonderful work we are building!<sup>30</sup>

Later in the same Bulletin, there is an excerpt of a speech that was labeled unacceptable because it proclaimed that the “world should be directed and dominated by the best race which time has ever produced,” referring to the shared heritage of the U.S. and Great Britain. The Newsletter even declared that this person was “AN ENGLISH-SPEAKING PRUSSIAN, NOT A FOUR MINUTE MAN.”<sup>31</sup> In Bulletin 7A, it states that the speaker should select from “material which is backed by his strongest convictions... Extraneous comments...and personal viewpoints of speakers supplementary to those given should not be expressed on an occasion when the speaker is publicly announced as a Government representative.” It seems that as long as people were not speaking negatively about allies or preaching ethnocentric domination, most rhetoric was acceptable. However, even that philosophy was inconsistent. Earlier in the same Bulletin, a mere three paragraphs above it on the same page, Four Minute Men were told that “material and

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<sup>29</sup> “Bar ‘Hymns of Hate,’” *New York Times*, February 4, 1918.

<sup>30</sup> *Four Minute Men News Edition A*, 2, ANL.

<sup>31</sup> *Four Minute Men News Edition A*, 7, ANL.

subject matter furnished to Four Minute Men, being matters deemed worthy of being made public, may be used, as any other correct information may be used, at the discretion of the speaker.”<sup>32</sup> These inconsistent statements frequented the CPI publications.

Numerous examples, some straight from the Four Minute Men offices, illustrate these claims. The same Four Minute Men Bulletin that said, “We must keep those goose-stepping, baby killing educated gorillas away from our shores” also included the statement that “There are only two classes of people on earth to-day—human beings and Germans—and we are going to keep America as it now is, a place for human beings.”<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, as early as June of 1917, pamphlets produced by the CPI elicited emotive responses by publishing exaggerations, stating that “the Prussian gospel not merely is war inevitably ‘hell’” but “made deliberately the lowest stratum of hell,” and rendered “with scientific precision.”<sup>34</sup> The pamphlet seemingly ignores that all belligerent nations utilize these same tactics during a war of attrition. The line of demarcation between acceptable and unacceptable behavior and speeches was not clearly defined and relying on emotive responses derived only from unadulterated facts proved unpredictable. Furthermore, there are numerous incidents where the demarcation is questionable at best.

The ambiguity of the speeches are noticeable when looking at the speeches themselves. In a speech titled “What Our Enemy Really Is,” Four Minute Man A.E. Anderson called America “to waken up...and then urge such awakening upon our neighbors.” Anderson then stated that “KAISERISM is an international cancer” that owns “the spirit of the devil.” Statements like these are both unambiguous and repugnant, and while not directed at the German people, it would be easy to conflate the two in a short speech. The speech then went on to say that the

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<sup>32</sup> Four Minute Men Division of the CPI, *Four Minute Men Bulletin 7A: Purpose and Plan of the Four Minute Men*, (Washington, DC: 25 Nov. 1917), 4, ANL.

<sup>33</sup> *Four Minute Men News Edition D*, 17, ANL.

<sup>34</sup> “Pamphlet Arraigns German Autocracy: President's War Address Amplified and Illuminated in an Official Publication,” *New York Times*, June 11, 1917.

“Sword of the Kaiser” was not for the “service of humanity..., but a sword of cruelty.” After the landing of Germans on American soil, “wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters will be dragged from their families, mistreated and forced to become mothers by German fathers” and if they refused they would be “maimed beings to whom death would be a welcome relief.” Speeches such as these rely on emotive language to produce results and do not reflect the “no hymn of hate” principle that the Four Minute Men proclaimed.

Examples of extreme rhetoric were employed during these speeches, such as labeling Germany as Satan or hell and German soldiers as rapists, baby killers, and numerous other deployable perpetrators. In another speech, Anderson declared that the “Bottomless Pit itself is not deep enough to hold the crimes” and that “blindfolded Justice herself will demand and insist upon the ultimate human penalty established by both law and religion, ‘an eye for an eye’, ‘a tooth for a tooth’ and ‘blood for blood’.”<sup>35</sup> Clearly, Edwards is calling for the most extreme punishment that humanity can inflict upon another, death, and the “Bottomless Pit” referenced here is most likely a reference to the final place of punishment for Satan in the New Testament, a place described as being full of torment. Linking Germans and Satan was a common practice. In a Four Minute Man speech in Denver, Wesley Frost referred to German U-boats as “Satan's carnival” and “a troop of orang-outang gorillas.”<sup>36</sup> With statements that associate Germans with Satan and allude to Germans raping American women, how could this not be an appeal to emotions? The only way these statements align with the official CPI position would be if they truly believed that Germans would land forces in the U.S.

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<sup>35</sup> A. E. Anderson to Edward Nash Hurley, 17 October 1917, Archives of the University of Notre Dame (hereafter cited as UNDA) CHUR#57, UNDA.

<sup>36</sup> James R. Mock & Cedric Larson, *Words that Won the War; the Story of the Committee on Public Information, 1917-1919*, (Princeton University Press, 1939), 127, ANL.

Even more telling, A. E. Anderson sent his speeches to Edward N. Hurley, Chairman of the United States Shipping Board, who approved of these messages stating that he read them “with much interest,” and believed that they “should go a great way towards waking the people up to a realization of just what this war means.”<sup>37</sup> Hurley, although not a member of the CPI, was a high ranking member of the government giving an endorsement of the speech and at the very least, this illustrates that even chairs of government boards could not recognize an appropriate speech or know the true purpose of the Four Minute Men. Furthermore, the first Anderson speech received praise as an exemplary Four Minute Men speech while the second heard condemnation for using phrases such as the “bottomless pit itself is not deep enough to hold the crimes so perpetrated” and then goes to say that these utterances were not “inspiring sentiments that breathe through every word uttered by our President” and not reminiscent of “any material in our Bulletins that bears remotely on this speech.”<sup>38</sup> The text once again encourages originality, but contends that if speakers wander too far, they lose their effectiveness. The sheer volume of speeches and speakers also made it virtually impossible to keep track of them, but the Bulletins were an effort by the CPI to control the ground game of an inherently top-down organization.

The Four Minute Men claimed that they were speaking truth, without hyperbole. They also claimed that “overstatement drives away those who are mildly interested” and “violent assertion of what may be true simply breeds more skepticism.”<sup>39</sup> However, the Four Minute Men Bulletins routinely employed hyperbolic and “violent assertion” to emphasize points. In *Four Minute Men Bulletin 37*, the text reads that the man who did not register for the draft was “lost; lost to the ranks of citizenship; lost to the mother who bore him; lost to the father who gave him a name; lost to the flag that protects him; lost to the Nation that calls him; lost to the world that

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<sup>37</sup> Edward Nash Hurley to A. E. Anderson, 19 October 1917, UNDA, CHUR#57.

<sup>38</sup> *Four Minute Men News Edition A*, 5, ANL; Mock & Larson, *Words that Won the War*, 122, ANL.

<sup>39</sup> *Four Minute Men News Edition A*, 2, ANL.

needs him.” The text goes on to say that since they refused to register, their “day of birth is henceforth a day of dishonor, He can never name it without a lie. His time has come, and he has denied it!” The paragraph ends stating that he is “a man without a country, and outcast!”<sup>40</sup>

Statements such as these could easily create uncertainty and confusion among the Four Minute Men. With all the ambiguity in thought and speech, as well as the Four Minute Men’s own informational sources, it is of little wonder why the Four Minute Men could not restrain from speeches of “violent assertion.” Without unequivocal guidelines and consistent examples, the Four Minute Men had no real way of knowing definitively whether they were giving appropriate or inappropriate speeches.

These same sentiments are echoed in *Four Minute Men News Edition D*, which declares that the Four Minute Men should “leave the hymns of hate, the sermons of self-glorification, the pernicious lying propaganda to the Prussian.” It goes on to say “The Prussian propagandist has adopted lying as his profession and is governed by no scruples whatever in his practice of the art of misinformation.” In this particular instance, name calling suffices in creating a proper Four Minute Men speech. The piece then commends the Four Minute Men for taking “charge this shield to be held in trust for a Nation of freemen” and urges the Four Minute Men to “not sully it with the stain of passion and unreason...” The author then beseeches the Four Minute Men to not “lay it [the shield] aside to grasp at some floating rumor which may seem to offer splendid material for a talk” finishing with the insight that “rumors will be poor substitutes for facts when the records are compared with the testimony of thousands of eyewitnesses.”<sup>41</sup> In a similar manner, *Four Minute Men Bulletin 24: The Danger to Democracy* criticizes the Kaiser’s belief that God was on his side when he said, “I am the instrument of the Almighty. I am his sword, his

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<sup>40</sup> Four Minute Men Division of the CPI, *Four Minute Men Bulletin 37: "Register!" National Registration*, (Washington, DC: August 21, 1918), 7, ANL.

<sup>41</sup> *Four Minute Men News Edition D*, 15, ANL.

agent. Woe and death to all those who shall oppose my will.”<sup>42</sup> Once again, phrases like this have been used by numerous nations throughout history, including the U.S., but were employed by the Four Minute Men as a sign of malevolence. Even more telling of this blatant hypocritical statement is that in *Four Minute Men Bulletin 39*, the division gives illustrative sermons and Bible verses for pastors to help support the war effort.<sup>43</sup> The lack of clear communication about acceptable speeches or the difference between what was or was not a “valid” Four Minute Men speech caused these distinctions to become even more blurred.

Rhetorical devices that proved troubling in the Bulletins involved violence and German aggression. In *Four Minute Men Bulletin 24* a speech contains phrases describing an American defeat: “Can you see this country, our America, bowing before the conquering Kaiser?” The speech then goes to say “such a world is not worth living in.”<sup>44</sup> While this speech received praise and was cited as an ideal speech model, in the *Four Minute Men Newsletter D*, a similar metaphor was dismissed as being written by a “speaker who indulges in such extreme statements.” The metaphor stated “that if Germany should win this war your flag would be hauled down, that the Stars and Stripes ... would be blotted out of the skies, never more to be seen in the free air of the world?” The author of the Bulletin then refers to this passage as an “oratorical fling” of a “boomerang” that would come back to hurt the speaker’s credibility later as all Americans know that the U.S. and the “Stars and Stripes will not be blotted out of the skies.”<sup>45</sup> Another speech in *Bulletin 24* diminishes the abilities of German allies, and essentially argues that they were vassal states with no governance outside of Germany and thus Germany

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<sup>42</sup> Four Minute Men Division of the CPI. *Four Minute Men Bulletin 24: The Danger to Democracy*, (Washington, DC: February 18, 1918), 11, ANL.

<sup>43</sup> Four Minute Men Division of the CPI, *Four Minute Men Bulletin 39: Fourth Liberty Loan*, (Washington, DC: September 12, 1918), 27-28, ANL.

<sup>44</sup> *Four Minute Men Bulletin 24: The Danger to Democracy*, 14, ANL.

<sup>45</sup> *Four Minute Men News Edition D*, 13, ANL.

“controls to-day a great domain which it calls Mittel-Europa or Middle Europe.”<sup>46</sup> The piece also claimed that the term “Mittel-Europa” was proof that Germany wanted to conquer and colonize Europe, regardless that Mittel-Europa is literally “Middle-Europe” in German. Violent rhetoric seemed to be especially troubling and once again metaphor and misrepresentation was given precedence over the plain words that the Four Minute Men said they prefer over fanciful speech.

The inconsistent speech problems carried throughout the upper leadership of the U.S. government. Leaders throughout the country made speeches inconsistent with the “NO HYMN of hate” rhetoric. General J. Franklin Bell declared that only “unconditional surrender will convince the German of today that he is not only unable, but unfit to dominate the earth.” General Bell went on to say that Germany must “be brought to his knees as a suppliant for mercy. Otherwise, he will claim that he has been successful...”<sup>47</sup> Billed as experts, some college professors declared that the war must continue until Germany “becomes a China, which must accept the decisions dealt out to it by other powers.” Professor Hart also blamed the Armenian Genocide on the Germans because Turkey followed German principles of warfare but with a “greater barbarity and cruelty” and “absolutely subject to the will and control of Germany.” Hart went on to say that “Americans realize that if any part of this country is occupied by the invading German army our people would be treated just as the people of Belgium.”<sup>48</sup> The Four Minute Men were directed to read and follow the news, and to utilize “any other correct information...at the discretion of the speaker.”<sup>49</sup> With government experts and high ranking military officers blurring the lines of appropriate speech, it would be of little wonder that the Four Minute Men

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<sup>46</sup> *Four Minute Men Bulletin 24: The Danger to Democracy*, 14, ANL.

<sup>47</sup> “Bell Warns Against A Half-Way Peace: General Says Only Unconditional Surrender by Germany Will End Kaiser’s Tyranny.” *New York Times*, May 7, 1918.

<sup>48</sup> “Why are we at war? Prof. Hart gives American Reasons” *Chicago Daily News*, April 28 1917, ANL.

<sup>49</sup> *Four Minute Men Bulletin 7A: Purpose and Plan of the Four Minute Men*, 4, ANL.



would also follow a similar discourse, giving speeches that would be on the periphery of truthfulness and sincerity.

Even President Wilson's "inspiring sentiments" were not immune to the exaggeration that the Four Minute Men sought to avoid.<sup>50</sup> In a letter to William L. Hutcheson, General President of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiner of America, Wilson unequivocally states that striking workers seeking better pay and working conditions "are undoubtedly giving aid and comfort to the enemy."<sup>51</sup> While one could easily be sympathetic with the plight of the President in a time of war, Wilson clearly depicts the striking workers engaged in an act of treason by utilizing the same language that defines "treason" in the Constitution. Even the "inspiring sentiments that breathe through every word uttered" by President Wilson contained inconsistencies.<sup>52</sup> Wilson's infamous Flag Day Speech is also telling. During this speech, Wilson argued that the United States was "forced into the war" by the "military masters of Germany" who "denied us the right to be neutral..." Wilson then stated that Germany had "stretched its ugly talons out and drawn blood from us."<sup>53</sup> Wilson then declared that Austria-Hungary "was to become part of the central German Empire, absorbed and dominated by the same forces and influences that had originally cemented the German states themselves," and that the "dream had its heart at Berlin. It could have had a heart nowhere else!"<sup>54</sup> Wilson also claimed that Turkey only sided with Germany by "the guns of German warships lying in the harbor at Constantinople."<sup>55</sup> Wilson continued to exaggerate by saying that a German victory requires a

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<sup>50</sup> *Four Minute Men News Edition A*, 5, ANL.

<sup>51</sup> "President Wilson's Message to Hutcheson." *New York Times*, Feb. 18, 1918.

<sup>52</sup> *Four Minute Men News Edition A*, 5; Mock & Larson, *Words that Won the War*, 122, ANL.

<sup>53</sup> "President Arraigns Germany's Intrigues." *Chicago Daily News*, June 16, 1917, ANL; "Fight for Freedom of World People and Nations," President Wilson's Appeal to the United States." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 15, 1917.

<sup>54</sup> "Fight for Freedom of World People and Nations," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 15, 1917.

<sup>55</sup> "Fight for Freedom of World People and Nations," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 15, 1917.

“pound of flesh” and “America will fall within the menace.”<sup>56</sup> Wilson ended his speech by saying that anyone who opposed the war would be “ground to powder beneath the weight of the great military empire” and “woe be to the man or group of men that seeks to stand in our way.”<sup>57</sup> While Wilson’s words were not as toxic and laden with ethnic stereotypes as other examples, they do show similarity of thought and pattern.

The Four Minute Men Bulletins also decried jingoism, or militant patriotism in times of war. In a piece called “No Time for Jingoism,” Bulletin 33 declares that “this is no time for jingoistic utterances, no time for vaunting of national superiority.” While those sentiments seem sincere, inconsistency once again continues in the Bulletin. Later on, while discussing charges levied against the U.S. by pacifists, the Bulletin states that the “charge of materialism against America seems particularly odious when coming from a worshiper of Prussia.” The Bulletin continues stating that Prussia was a “land that studied war as a money-making occupation” and “ruled by a nation-wide trust.” The Bulletin then finishes by saying that “Kaiser, Krupp, and Kultur” was the “new triumvirate of Pompey, Caesar, and Crassus.”<sup>58</sup> The Bulletin links Germany and its “Kaiser” and “Kultur” to the demise of democracy in favor of autocracy in Rome. It also intentionally links German success during the war to the possible fall of worldwide democracy. This comparison taps into the American psyche, especially since the Founding Fathers used the Roman Republic as a model during the creation of the U.S. government, making it an extremely effective device. However, these phrases and metaphors can easily be conflated

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<sup>56</sup> Arthur Sears Henning, “Wilson Bares German Plot; Must Fight It: Cannot Falter Now; Woe To Any Who Stand.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 15, 1917; “Fight for Freedom of World People and Nations,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 15, 1917.

<sup>57</sup> Henning, “Wilson Bares German Plot,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 15, 1917; “Fight for Freedom of World People and Nations,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 15, 1917.

<sup>58</sup> Four Minute Men Division of the CPI, *Four Minute Men Bulletin 33: The Meaning of America*, (Washington, DC: June 29, 1918), 2, 5, ANL.

with the often decried “hymns of hate,” “violent assertion,” and jingoisms that the Four Minute Men were to avoid.

The Four Minute Men Bulletins and Newsletters did give highlights of speeches that they felt went too far in their claims. In another speech highlighted as inappropriate, the speaker argues that the German Government and their military officers “level of decency and sense of right and justice is lower than hell, and a code of rules issued as a standard for mankind by his satanic majesty would read like those of a saint in comparison with the military mandates of the Prussian autocracy.”<sup>59</sup> The statements are unequivocal and not based in fact as the Bulletins contend. However, the concern was not with the hyperbolic statements, but that the statement would not “bring conviction to those who are somewhat in doubt.”<sup>60</sup> Later in the same Bulletin, speech suggestions are given, such as using the phrase “America will end the war” in place of “America will win the war,” claiming that this change will eliminate the “hint of arrogance and of self-sufficiency.” However, one wonders if the subtle difference is really noticeable. The divisional leaders of the CPI thought so and argued that the phrase “America will end the war” was a “no-less truthful but entirely unobjectionable phrase, to express the same meaning.”<sup>61</sup>

At other times the Bulletins seem to resort to misinformation and maybe even outright lies. *Four Minute Men Bulletin 33* claims that the Kaiser wants to enslave blacks and then compares black slavery to the plight of the German people under autocracy.<sup>62</sup> Yet in the *Four Minute Men Bulletin 35*, German spies are charged with misleading “(the colored) race...that if they will not oppose the German Government” they “will be rewarded with Ford automobiles when Germany is in control here.” This same Bulletin then tells that German spies told African-

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<sup>59</sup> *Four Minute Men News Edition D*, 12-13, ANL.

<sup>60</sup> *Four Minute Men News Edition D*, 13, ANL.

<sup>61</sup> *Four Minute Men News Edition D*, 14, ANL.

<sup>62</sup> *Four Minute Men Bulletin 33: The Meaning of America*, 10, ANL.

Americans that they invaded Belgium to avenge the “the cruel treatment of negroes in the Congo.” While German spies most likely operated within the U.S. in some capacity, it was not likely that German spies would make such unbelievable promises and claims, no matter the degree of “illiteracy and consequent credulity” the Four Minute Men felt of African-Americans during this time. Once again, this demonstrates that the leaders of the Four Minute Men went against their own “not to inflame passion” maxim.

The inappropriateness of Four Minute Men speeches leads to certain questions about why these messages would have been thought to be acceptable, even inside the confines of passionate discourse that resides in times of war. The answer may lie within the network of the upper echelons of the CPI. With the mixture of muckraking journalism and PR, elements of exaggeration and “sensational exposes” allowed both groups to further their agenda.<sup>63</sup> Since muckraking and PR struggled against each other, their cooperation gave creditability to the CPI, allowing the CPI to fashion their message as a Progressive message.<sup>64</sup> The most prominent example of this mixture producing trustworthiness stems from earlier encounters between Ida Tarbell, George Creel, and Ivy Lee during the Ludlow Massacre on April 20, 1914. After prolonged periods of strikes and protests by coal miners, the Colorado National Guard and Colorado Fuel & Iron Company camp guards attacked the strikers after violent acts started to occur from both parties, resulting in two dozen deaths, including women and children, as they set fire to the coal miners’ tent colony. During the massacre, Ivy Lee worked as the PR representative of Standard Oil and successfully used bulletins to convince middle class workers not involved in the strike that the strikers were paid fairly. Lee was less successful when he argued that the people gunned down by Standard Oil and the Colorado National Guard were

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<sup>63</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*, 59-60.

<sup>64</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 275-276.

hired thugs, and 82 year-old union organizer “Mother” Jones was either a prostitute or a Madame.<sup>65</sup> Ida Tarbell quickly denounced him as liar while Upton Sinclair nicknamed him “Poison Ivy.” Although these scathing critiques hurt Lee’s reputation, they were tame compared to Lee’s future employer George Creel. Creel referred to Lee as a “poisoner of public opinion” and condemned him for presenting an “entirely false view of the situation.”<sup>66</sup> During their time with the CPI, PR experts and muckraker journalists worked together for the common good, but that does not mean that they gave up their sensationalist approach. Consequently, the synergistic grouping of widely known opponents gave a sense of urgency and credibility to the CPI’s wartime messages.

While it is virtually impossible to say how effectively the CPI’s politics of persuasion changed people’s perceptions of reality, we can look at newspaper accounts and other documents to look for rhetorical trends. At the University of Notre Dame, the student magazine, *The Scholastic* contains a section called “Senior Thoughts,” which contains brief maxims from presently departing seniors to their underclassmen. One adage declared that the “hymn of hate seems to be the favorite expression of German patriotism.” The “hymn of hate seems to be referencing the common refrain of the Four Minute Men. Another saying declares that if “you don’t “come across” the Kaiser will.”<sup>67</sup> This phrase is verbatim to the second half of suggested opening phrases in *Four Minute Men Bulletin 29*: “Who will come across first? If you don’t come across, the Kaiser will.”<sup>68</sup> Once again it is nearly impossible to ascertain whether the authors of these “senior thoughts” were Four Minute Men as they are anonymous, it does demonstrate some permeation of thought between the Four Minute Men and the *Scholastic*

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<sup>65</sup> Ewen, *PR!: A Social History of Spin*, 78-79.

<sup>66</sup> Ewen, *PR!: A Social History of Spin*, 83.

<sup>67</sup> “Senior Thoughts,” *The Notre Dame Scholastic* vol. LI no. 29, Notre Dame, IN: May 18, 1918, UNDA 495.

<sup>68</sup> Four Minute Men Division of the CPI, *Four Minute Men Bulletin 29: The Third Liberty Loan*. Washington, DC: April 6, 1918, 12, ANL.

contributors. In addition, while this demonstrates similar impassioned allegiance, it cannot unequivocally demonstrate a direct cause and effect, but with the active engagement of the Four Minute Men, it does seem more likely.

Without question, the CPI served as the publicity arm of the government and publicity proved effective in gaining adherents and maintaining wartime enthusiasm. “In all things,” wrote Creel, “from first to last, without halt or change, it was a plain publicity proposition, a vast enterprise in salesmanship, the world's greatest adventure in advertising.” He later argued that the war gave him the opportunity to justify and recognize “advertising as a real profession.”<sup>69</sup> The CPI and the Four Minute Men were clearly a top-down organization as can be seen in the CPI’s desire to regulate the Four Minute Men and although it is essential for a well-organized operation to have means of control, the CPI contained no real mechanisms to enforce proper behavior or speeches. The official correspondence also frequently reported inconsistent or contradictory statements that could easily be exploited by Four Minute Men and as long as they did not practice sedition, the CPI would benefit to a degree.

The CPI and the Four Minute Men fundamentally transformed the interaction between the state and its citizens during this time. Consequently, government-sponsored publicity for policy became normative. A prominent example would be *Migrant Mother*, the iconic picture of the Great Depression, produced by a government worker who promoted a governmental agency’s agenda.<sup>70</sup> Another telling example would be government-sponsored Public Service Announcements for benevolent causes like antismoking campaigns or AIDS prevention. Other facets of the CPI and the Four Minute Men need to be further explored to help understand changes in the role of government and its citizens, such as the use of women in their efforts,

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<sup>69</sup> Creel, *How we Advertised America*, 4, 157.

<sup>70</sup> T.H. Watkins, *The Great Depression: America in the 1930's* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1993): 6.

especially the role of prominent women in the CPI like muckraker Ida Tarbell. There are several other aspects of American society that could be explored through systematic study of the CPI and the Four Minute Men, such as race and gender.

The Four Minute Men are a cultural relic of U.S. involvement in World War One, and their speeches serve as examples of reasonable and unreasonable, but always passionate, discourse in times of war. The lack of a clear line of demarcation between acceptable and unacceptable speeches make the Four Minute Men an abundant source of information that can be gleaned to understand how some citizens felt in a time of duress under the worst war the world has yet to see. Furthermore, the Four Minute Men's consistently inconsistent speeches illustrate the zealous commitment to families and their nation during the Great War. This can be clearly seen in their speeches, which use colorful and adroit phrases to strengthen the resolve of a nation at war. Thus, the Four Minute Men, the CPI, and U.S. propaganda in general are social and cultural history that need to be explored further and from social and cultural perspectives.

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